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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 001001

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DEPT FOR SCA/INS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: KING MAKES POSITIVE STEP, BUT THEN A REVERSAL?

REF: A. KATHMANDU 690

[1](#)B. KATHMANDU 993

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) On April 18, the government temporarily released Madhav Kumar Nepal, President of the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) from jail, while the Supreme Court ordered 172 Party cadre and human rights activists to be released from jail on April 17. As demonstrations continued, Maoist leaders Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai issued a statement on April 17 warning the Parties not to compromise with the King. On April 17, security forces shot and killed a demonstrator in south-central Nepal while the Maoists killed a policeman in eastern Nepal. Party leaders confirmed that, contrary to rumors, the Parties' April 20 mass rally in Kathmandu was still a go. At least one convoy of 23 vehicles including six trucks of much needed vegetables, escorted by the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA), is due to arrive in the capital from the Indian border the evening of April 18. Food, fuel and water shortages remain a looming problem across Nepal in cities away from the Nepal-India border. The international airport in Kathmandu and domestic air service continue to operate, and civil aviation authorities plan to keep air services functioning. There were more reports on April 18 of civil servants protesting from the Home Ministry, Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN), and state-owned Nepal Bank Limited. Nepalis and Post wait to see what the King's next move will be. End Summary.

UML LEADER TEMPORARILY RELEASED, OTHER POLITICOS RELEASED FROM JAIL

[1](#)2. (C) During the afternoon of April 18, the government released CPN-UML President Madhav Kumar Nepal from prison. However, in a subsequent phone call, K.P. Oli, Central Committee Member of the CPN-UML, explained to Emboff that M.K. Nepal had been taken back to prison while he was on his way home. According to news reports, on April 17, responding to habeas corpus petitions, the Supreme Court ordered His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMGN) to release 172

prisoners, who were mainly Party cadre and human rights activists. The Ambassador has constantly stressed to various members of HMGN, including the King himself, that political detainees needed to be released in order to restore democracy (septel).

MAOISTS WARN AGAINST PARTIES RECONCILING WITH THE KING; KILL ONE POLICEMAN

13. (U) In a statement printed in the April 18 edition of the Kathmandu Post newspaper, Maoist leaders Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai warned the political parties not to compromise with the King. The statement urged all involved to be cautious of any attempts to restore the status quo ante. The main point of the statement read, "our stand is that the current movement should not and cannot be ended with a compromise unless the objective of establishing a democratic republic is achieved through unconditional constitutional assembly." The Maoist leaders urged political parties, civic society, and the people to make the ongoing movement more consolidated and effective to achieve its "last objective." They clarified that their goal was the getting rid of the monarchy entirely. The statement said the 12-point understanding used the phrase "end of the autocratic monarchy and establishment of complete democracy which meant the end of the monarchy and establishment of a democratic republic which would be established through free and fair elections to a constituent assembly." If the Parties compromised, the Maoist leaders said, the movement would nevertheless continue. In other Maoist-related events, news reports stated that Maoists shot and killed Police Inspector Shyam Sundar Bista of Rautahat District Traffic Police Office in Chandranigahapur (eastern Nepal).

ANOTHER PROTESTOR KILLED BY SECURITY FORCES; DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUE

14. (SBU) On April 17, security forces shot and killed a CPN-UML activist in Bara District (south-central Nepal) and injured dozens during a demonstration. Demonstrators around the country and in a rainy Kathmandu continued to take to the streets in support of the seven-party alliance's thirteen-day-old general strike. Police sources report that on April 18 there were 50,000 demonstrators in Nepalgunj (western Nepal), 5,000 in Pokhara (central Nepal), 35,000 in Chitwan (south-central Nepal), and 10,000 in Nawalparasai (central Nepal). An Embassy source in Biratnagar (eastern Nepal) said there were approximately 10,000 people demonstrating in that city, and a large rally was planned again for April 19. News reports indicated ongoing demonstrations in the Bara District (central Nepal) and the central Nepal towns of Hetauda, Makawanpur, and Sindhupalchowk. Also, there were demonstrations reported in the districts surrounding Kathmandu, including Dhading, Ramechapp and Kavre. In Kathmandu, day-long rain limited demonstrations to small crowds at the Gongabu, Chabahil, and Kalanki intersections along the Ring Road; north of the Ring Road in Buddhanilkantha; and inside the Ring Road in Lalitpur. Early on the afternoon of April 18, Emboff observed that neither the handful of demonstrators nor the security forces posted at major Ring Road intersections looked active. The Parties called for half-hour blackouts on the evenings of April 17 and 18 that were enforced by protestors carrying torches.

PARTIES' APRIL 20 RALLY IN KATHMANDU TO GO AHEAD AS PLANNED

15. (C) Rumors that the Parties were canceling their April 20 mass rally in Kathmandu are untrue, according to Party sources. Arjun Narsingh K.C., Central Committee member of the Nepali Congress (NC), stressed to Emboff that the Parties' April 20 program would not be canceled. The Joint General Secretary for the Nepal Sadbhavana Party explained to Emboff that there was "no question" of canceling the April 20 program and that demonstrations would be ongoing. Manmohan

Bhattarai, Central Committee Member of the Nepali Congress-Democratic (NC-D), told Emboff that the April 20 demonstration would be "serious." Although it might be infiltrated by Maoists, he noted that the rally would not be violent as people were "not in the mood." Bhattarai also commented that he thought the King would not compromise with the Parties and suggested a round-table discussion including the Maoists would be the best solution to the political impasse.

LIMITED MOVEMENT OF VEHICLES IN AND OUT OF KATHMANDU, CONVOYS
EN ROUTE...

¶6. (SBU) According to news media, since the general-strike began on April 6, approximately 1,040 vehicles (including motorcycles) had entered Kathmandu Valley and only 1,000 had left. (Note: On normal days the aggregate number of vehicles entering and leaving the Kathmandu Valley exceeds 3,500. End Note). Drivers' hesitancy is attributed to both support for the Parties' strike and fear of Maoist retribution. Two trucks trying to leave Kathmandu recently to collect salt in Birjunj (southern Nepal bordertown) reportedly returned to Kathmandu after reaching only the western checkpoint in the Valley because of the "tense situation" on the roads. The spokesperson for the Ministry of Labor and Transport Management announced on April 17 that the Ministry had decided to provide USD 50 to drivers and USD 20 to driver's helpers willing to travel from Birgunj to Kathmandu to deliver needed supplies to the capital city. Nepal Police and RNA sources confirmed that an RNA-escorted convoy of 23 vehicles, which included three petrol tankers and six trucks with vegetables, left Bharatpur (central Nepal) the morning of April 18 and was due to arrive in Kathmandu in the evening. The convoy had left the border town of Birgunj on April 17 and halted in Bharatpur overnight after demonstrators had tried to stop it, resulting in security forces firing on the protestors (ref B). An RNA source said there were other convoys moving toward Kathmandu, but acknowledged that traffic volume on the highways was well below normal.

... AS FUEL, FOOD, AND WATER CONCERNS REMAIN

¶7. (U) Food, fuel, and now water shortages are a concern in many parts of Kathmandu. Embassy contacts in the terai border towns all indicated that the terai cities had plenty of food because of the nearby open border with India. However, a contact in Pokhara said the price of food items there had increased 100 - 600 percent. In Kathmandu, many private water tanker companies that normally augment the inadequate water supply provided by the Nepal Drinking Water Corporation (NDWC) have reportedly been unable to deliver to some of their customers during the general-strike. (Note: At this time of the year the NDWC is only able to provide one-fourth of the water demand for the Kathmandu Valley. Most people either pay for water tanker deliveries or use free public water taps). While driving along Kathmandu's Ring Road on April 18, Emboff observed approximately 200 people waiting in line to use a public water tap in the northwestern Gongabu area. Kusum Shahi of the Chundevi neighborhood of Kathmandu (where many Embassy employees live) said that, due to the lack of NWDC water or private tankers, she has had to buy bottled mineral water for the last five days "to drink and cook."

INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AND DOMESTIC FLIGHTS CONTINUE TO
FUNCTION

¶8. (C) Dispelling rumors, Kamal Kumar K.C., Officiating Director General for the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN), told Emboff that, despite the ongoing general strike, Kathmandu's international airport would continue to remain open. Regarding the possibility of a strike by air traffic controllers, he explained that CAAN had a contingency plan and that air traffic services would not be interrupted. He

noted that there were no planned interruptions to domestic flight services despite rumors to the contrary on April 17 (ref B).

CIVIL SERVANTS STILL PROTESTING

¶19. (SBU) According to news reports, there were over twenty Home Ministry employees arrested for demonstrating on April 18. Workers at Nepal Bank Limited in Sindhupalchowk reportedly staged a sit-in on the morning of April 18. Mr. K.C. of CAAN reported that ten to twelve members of the Civil Aviation Authority Workers Union had protested in front of CAAN headquarters today.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) As demonstrations and shortages of basic necessities continue, Nepalis are waiting to see what the King will do next. The temporary release of Madhav Kumar Nepal is still a mystery, and could have been a signal that the King realized the release of political detainees is a necessary step to having dialogue with Party leaders. Anything short of the transfer of power by the King to the political parties, however, is likely to be rejected and cause a further upsurge of Nepalis participating in the pro-democracy movement.

MORIARTY